

Zinke: 'Glencore should be held accountable'

By **RICHARD HANNERS** Hungry Horse News | Posted: Wednesday, April 8, 2015 8:34 am

Rep. Ryan Zinke responded to insistent questions from Columbia Falls Area Chamber of Commerce president Stacey Schnebel about the Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. site during a town hall meeting at Flathead Valley Community College on April 2 that drew about 150 people.

Schnebel cited the “tone” of Zinke’s March 4 letter to Gov. Steve Bullock opposed to placing the CFAC site on the federal Superfund’s National Priorities List for cleanup.

“You seem to be supporting the best interests of Glencore, but the local community wants the site listed,” she said, inviting him to attend the next public meeting about CFAC.

Zinke said he didn’t favor Glencore, the Swiss-based commodities trader that bought the CFAC smelter in 1999.

“They should be held accountable,” he said.

Zinke said he supports an environmental survey of the site to “find out what’s there and how to mitigate it in the shortest time.” The Environmental Protection Agency has 18 Superfund sites in Montana, and none have been completed and taken off the list, he said.

“My fear is that the CFAC site will never come off the listing,” he said.

Zinke touted the economic significance of the CFAC site for economic redevelopment, with a large gas pipeline, railroad spur and access to the Bonneville Power Administration power grid.

“It could revitalize Columbia Falls,” he said. “The Superfund process will delay that.”

Schnebel noted that some Superfund sites in Montana have been partially redeveloped while the cleanup process continued.

“The community doesn’t trust Glencore,” she said.

Zinke, who mentioned that he had talked with Glencore, said he wants a third party to conduct the environmental survey and reiterated his point about problems with the Superfund process.



Believes Superfund process has a bad record

Rep. Ryan Zinke speaks at a town hall meeting at Flathead Valley Community College on April 2. Photo by Brenda Ahearn / Daily Inter Lake

“The Superfund is open-ended,” he said. “Their record is bad.”

“It took a lot of decades to get where it is today,” Schnebel said. “I think it’s pie-in-the-sky to think it can be cleaned up so quickly.”

She asked Zinke to represent the community, not Glencore.

“If I believed that the EPA was the fastest way to clean up the site, I would go that way,” he said.

Zinke also responded to a question from Columbia Falls city councilor Mike Shepard about the Equal Access to Justice Act, which Shepard said was being used by environmentalists to sue the U.S. Forest Service and “shut down logging.”

Zinke said he recently met with the Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and they agreed “it’s not the same Forest Service anymore.”

“The biggest part of their budget is firefighting, and the second is litigation,” Zinke said.

The result has been tremendous growth in the legal industry at the expense of forest management, Zinke said. At the same time, Zinke said he opposed transferring federal lands to the states.

“I want to see better management of federal lands,” he said. “How can we get more scientists and less lawyers in the Forest Service? How can we get back to sustainable yield managing?”